

Outreach and engagement to achieve hepatitis C

micro-elimination in Cairns, Australia

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BACKGROUND

Cairns and Hinterland in Queensland, Australia, has a population of approximately 259,000, was one of the first locations to lead a hepatitis C micro-elimination response in Australia. Seven years since the introduction of direct acting antivirals (March 2016) the number of clients presenting to clinics for testing and treatment has dramatically declined. Engaging clients in the community via outreach models will be key to achieving hepatitis C elimination.

METHODS

The Cairns community outreach and engagement model includes nurse-led approach working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers to deliver rapid point-of-care (POC) RNA testing utilising cash incentives, and peer-support. We have delivered sessions across 10 services, including probation & parole, homeless shelters and mental health services.

RESULTS

From July 2022 to August 2023 647 clients were screened and 631 clients were eligible and 606 completed POC RNA testing. Median age was 40 years (range 18-73), majority were male at 69% and 27% were experiencing housing instability.

A large proportion of clients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with 30% Aboriginal, 10% Torres Strait Islander and 14% both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The majority of participants (71%) were new clients, and just over half (60%) reported a history of HCV testing. Thirty people tested RNA positive (4.9%) and 21 have commenced treatment (70%). Incentives were used to engage 98% of participants and peer workers were involved in recruiting 16% of participants.

HCV positivity ranged from 0 - 12% across the outreach sites, HCV positivity was highest in the 50 to 64 years age group (9%) compared to 18-29 years (4.8%), 30-39 years (3.2%), 40-49 years (3.8%), higher among men (5.5%) compared to women (3.8%), higher among non-Indigenous participants (7.4%) compared to than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (3.1%), and higher among those who had reported a previous HCV test (7.9%) compared to those who hadn't tested before (1.0%) or reported don't know (2.4%).

CONCLUSIONS

The micro-elimination program in Cairns is finding the remaining people who haven't yet engaged in HCV testing or treatment. We are learning more about community prevalence amongst key populations including people who inject drugs, people on probation and parole orders, people experiencing homelessness, people living in emergency accommodation, rural residents and people engaging with mental health and drug and alcohol services which in enabling us to tailor our outreach services to meet the needs of the community.

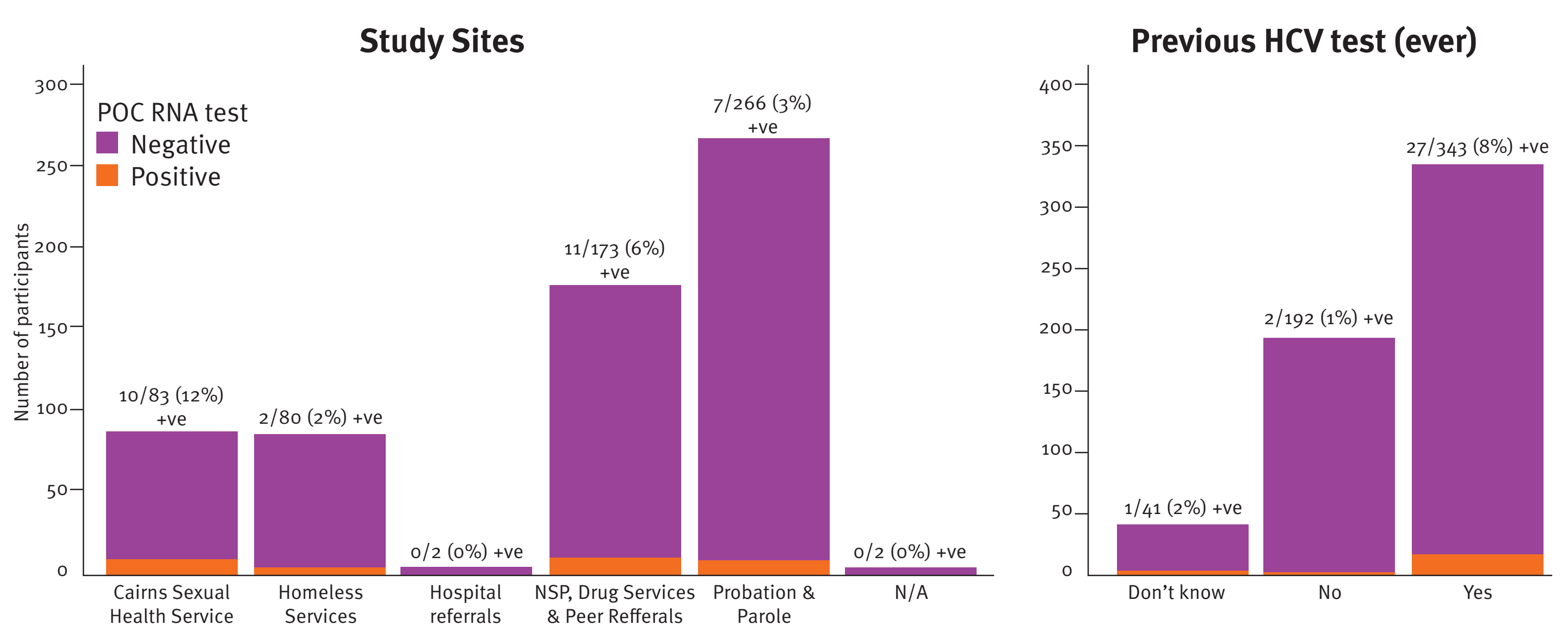
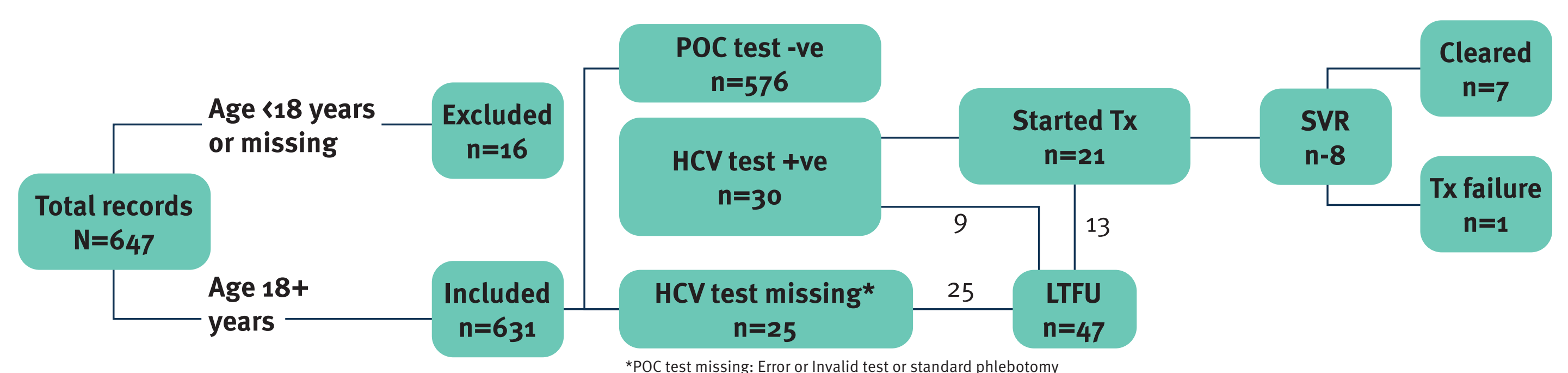
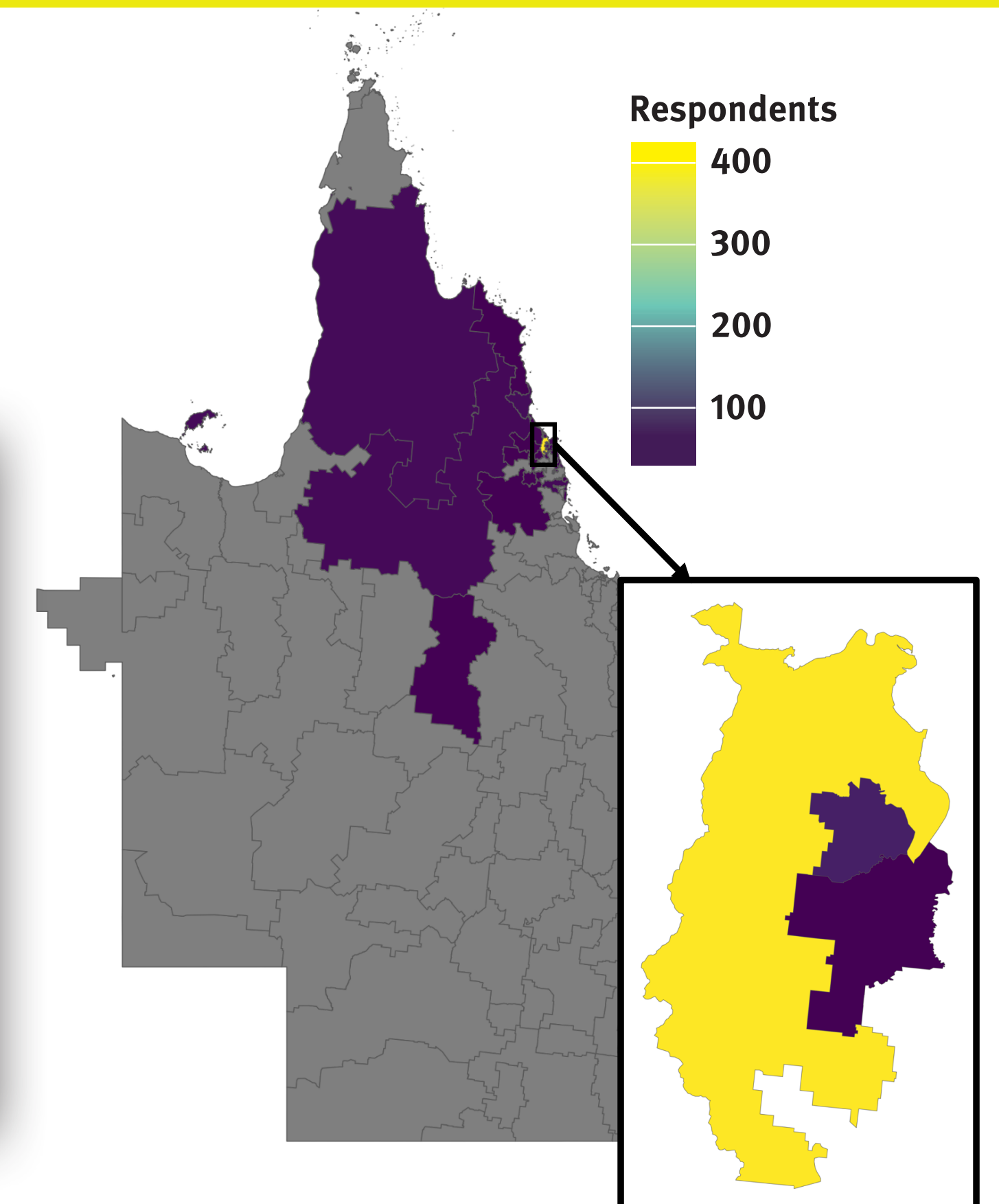


Table 1: Presentation of Point of Care (POC) data

Variable	Overall	Clients who tested Positive	Positivity
Total Clients who had POC	N=606	N=30	4.9%
Age at interview (years)	40 (18-73)	44 (19-63)	44 (19-63)
Gender	n=602		
Female	186 (31%)	7 (23%)	7 (3.8%)
Male	415 (69%)	23 (77%)	23 (5.5%)
Transgender	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status			
Don't know	9 (1.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
No	92 (15%)	11 (37%)	11 (12%)
Not Indigenous	180 (30%)	9 (30%)	9 (5.0%)
Yes - Aboriginal	180 (30%)	7 (23%)	7 (3.9%)
Yes - Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	84 (14%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (2.4%)
Yes - Torres Strait Islander	60 (9.9%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (1.7%)
Stable accommodation	n=567		
Stable	415 (73%)	19 (66%)	19 (4.6%)
Unstable	152 (27%)	10 (34%)	10 (6.6%)
HCV related risk factors			
History of injecting drug use	350 (58%)	27 (90%)	27 (7.7%)
History of incarceration	303 (50%)	21 (70%)	21 (6.9%)
Previous blood transfusion	20 (3.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Opioid substitution therapy	16 (2.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
HCV ever tested before			
Don't know	41 (7.1%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (2.4%)
No	192 (33%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (1.0%)
Yes	343 (60%)	27 (90%)	27 (7.9%)
Has the participant ever been confirmed HCV positive?	n=146		
Don't know	27 (18%)	2 (18%)	7.4%
No	65 (45%)	2 (18%)	3.1%
Yes	54 (37%)	7 (64%)	13%
Incentivised test	587 (98%)	30 (100%)	30 (5.1%)
Peer involved in recruitment	96 (16%)	7 (23%)	7 (7.3%)
New client to Cairns Sexual Health Service	427 (71%)	17 (59%)	17 (4.0%)
Method for receiving POC RNA test result	n=595		
Did not receive	16 (2.7%)	3 (11%)	3 (19%)
Over the phone	479 (81%)	17 (61%)	17 (3.5%)
Returned to service at a later time or date to receive in person	74 (12%)	6 (21%)	6 (8.1%)
Stayed to receive in person	26 (4.4%)	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.7%)